DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 560 SP 034 964

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TITLE	A Visual Construct on the Role of the Teacher in Multicultural Education.
PUB DATE	Jan 94
NOTE	14p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Course Content; *Course Descriptions; Course Objectives; Course Organization; *Education Courses; Education Majors; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Learning Activities; *Multicultural Education; Outcomes of Education; Perspective Taking; Teacher Education; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	*Conceptual Models; *Diversity Concept

ABSTRACT

This paper describes an undergraduate teacher education course offered at Urbana University (Ohio). The course introduces preservice teachers to the nature of multiculturalism in terms of economic, social, intellectual, age, and gender differences, leading participants to explore this educational process from sociological and psychological perspectives. The class provides a framework for: exploring influences that bear on students, teachers, and schools in terms of societal pressures and human diversity; recognizing prejudice, scapegoating, and discrimination; gaining the helping skills needed for promoting multicultural sensitivities; and examining the individual's own belief systems. Class activities run the gamut from class discussions to a videotape production. For purposes of synthesizing course material, a culminating project deals with the development of a visual construct on the role of the teacher in multicultural education. Based on the development of a conceptual model, the members of one class concluded that the desired status of multicultural education would be a continuing process whereby all students would experience educational equality regardless of personal backgrounds. An illustration of the visual construct is included. (LL)

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ED 366 560

A Visual Construct on The Role of the Teacher in Multicultural Education

Urbana University
Urbana, Ohio

An Original Manuscript

January 21, 1994

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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During the fall semester of 1993, 15 students took my undergraduate class in multicultural education at Urbana University in Urbana, Ohio. Twelve students already possessed degrees and were retraining for teacher certification in their area of specialty. Of the 12, one participant had a Ph.D. while another student had earned a masters degree. Three students were in this class to complete their training in teacher education as regular undergraduates. This particular class marked the twelfth time for my teaching this course which has included three accelerated classes on human diversity.

The rationale for this type of course at Urbana Univeristy is to introduce the students to the nature of multiculturalism in terms of economic, social, intellectual, age, and gender differences of cultures. These explorations lead the participants to study this educational process from sociological and psychological perspectives. The course text was Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives by Banks and Banks. (1).

The general aims included learning the influences that bear on students, teachers, and schools in terms of societal pressures and human diversity. Class participants were to recognize prejudice, scapegoating and discrimination in their own behaviors and the

behaviors of other people. Opportunities were extended for understanding and nurturing helping skills needed for promoting multicultural sensitivities. Participants examined their own belief systems of traditional and progressive orientations plus the psychological approaches of behaviorism and phenomenology. Finally, the class members identified issues and problems from the perpectives of given minority groups.

Class activities ranged the gamut from class discussions to a videotape production. The culminating projects dealt with the development of a visual construct on the role of the teacher in multicultural education. We studied the topics of multicultures, cultures, race, class, gender, social classes, language diversity, and exceptionality for the first half of the semester.

Some of these class approaches are worth mentioning as students stretched their minds in multicultural endeavors. Students were asked to write down their most memorable events that had impacted upon them in terms of multicultural education. With the permission of each participant, this professor read each descriptive event. Each person had the opportunity to elaborate and to answer any particular question. These ice breakers provided us a basis to

begin meaningful dialogues as the participants opened themselves to the course concepts. We then began to explore the variety of human differences within our own group.

The group was to state only obvious differences which included five females and ten males ranging in ages from 21 to 52. We noted physical differences and talked about our own cultural backgrounds. Religions tended to be represented by the Protestant and Catholic faiths with mostly a white, Anglo Saxon background. Two people could readily understand and identify with the Native American culture and one person represented the black perspective.

A turning point occurred when the professor asked the class to project what the given written descriptions of three students would be in terms of their potential developments. The responses were not very favorable until we learned that the actual descriptions were of Thomas Edison, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Albert Einstein. This learning event cautioned us to be more descriptive of student characteristics and be hesitant to judge behaviors too quickly.

The helping process was fostered by comprehension of given information and then enacted in two role-playing situations. The first situation portrayed a teacher unsympathetic to some desperate

needs of an Hispanic student who had difficulty with the English language.

The second role situation focused upon a coach who gave emotional support to an athlete facing a difficult problem of a personal nature. These role situations sensitized us to how behavior of teachers affect the nature of student behaviors in a classroom. We discussed how teachers may be unaware of these apparent dynamics. Participants gained these human insights through an introduction to role playing as advocated by Joyce and Weil in their book Models of Teaching. (2,pp. 241-259).

The second half of the semester highlighted research reports of a small groups on minority, religious, or ethnic groups. The group reports had four criteria for evaluation: depth of content, organization, clarity of expression, and use of appropriate media, materials, and resource personnel. Each research project needed to include the following subtopics: historical overview, family relationships, economics, stereotypes, and expressive art forms. The oral presentation guidelines for the research reports included 30 minutes of length, minimum of one instructional aid, clear expression, comprehension of subject matter, recognition of verbal and non

-verbal clues from the audience, and presentation approach. The chosen groups included the Amish-Americans, Applalachian-Americans, Native-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Mormons.

More applications for these potential teachers took place as a video-tape presentation on multicultural education took place. The group investigation model by Joyce and Weil was studied. (3, pp.226 -240). These group processes began with a puzzling situation on what to present on tape. A task force of students assigned topics of overview, newscast, role situations, and a panel discussion. This professor gave the introductory remarks and made the concluding statements. The significance of this project was that all students participated and the groups became cohesive as a unit. Also, it gave us a model of information for other groups to follow in multicultural education.

As participants began to ponder their review for a final examination, this professor offered a mental challenge to the group. A visual construct of multicultural education was presented to the group for the purpose of synthesizing the course material. Students would help manipulate given concepts until everyone was comfortable with the arrangements. As we continued to ponder issues

and conceptualizations, students worked in small groups to formulate some initial developments for a forthcoming conceptual model on the role of the teacher in multicultural education. These small group efforts became the final examination. One student was chosen to describe how the visual construct might work for a potential teacher functioning in a classroom situation

The visual construct begins with multicultural education at the top. It was agreed that such education involves the present status of unequal opportunity to people because of physical conditions, age, race, gender, social class, ethnicity, and exceptionality. We concluded that the desired status of multicultural education would be a continuing process whereby all students would experience educational equality regardless of personal backgrounds. This spectrum of thought has implications for the role of the teacher who most likely would function between the continuum of present status and desired status. Our position is that the teacher should be knowledgeable of where his or her belief lies on this continuum.

The teacher faces more diversity of values in this construct. Multicultural education in itself includes valuing the diversity of human differences while the values of the school and community

might center on more conformity of human behaviors. This educator copes with a belief system that includes a traditional or a progressive view of this topic as a concept and a mode of operation in the classroom. The belief system is also tempered and modified as the individual role of the teacher becomes affected by the personal positions taken on psychological approaches

While the teacher holds a personal belief system, events and forces may shape and change decisions for the classroom of students. Informal and formal policy makers grapple with some perplexing questions. Should schools assimilate students into the mainstream of society? Should students have their identities affirmed first? Should differences within a given group of people be explored as a basis for understanding and coping with differences among and between cultural groups? Should traditions of cultural groups be highlighted as a basis to understanding human differences. Should reform measures be first instituted for more idealized programs of multicultual education?

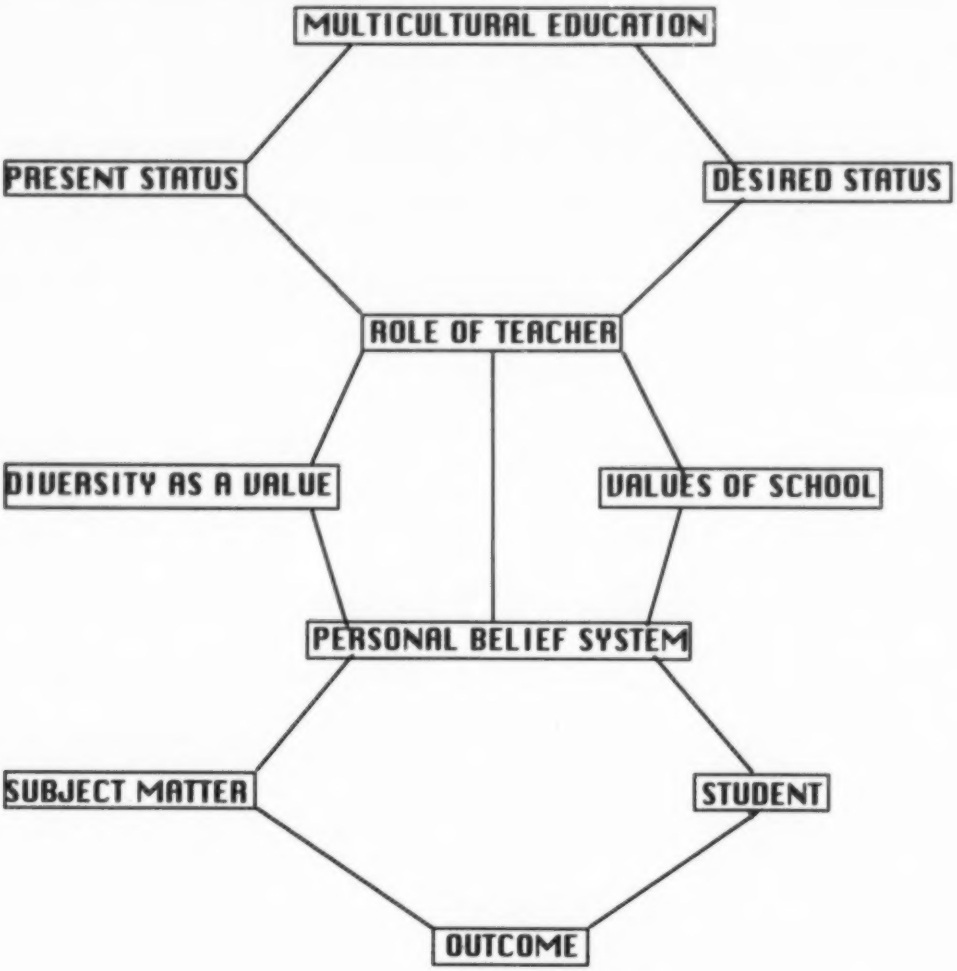
According to this construct, the teacher first defines multicultural education to find a role for handling the given subject matter. The teacher realizes that a personal belief system might be

altered due to factors in the school and community environment. If such change takes place, it is best to realize such compromises in aims and activities to promote multicultural education in the curriculum.

As you will note in this evolving construct, the teacher has many dynamics to consider before subject matter is presented to the wide variety of students in a given classroom. If multicultural education is to succeed, this time and effort would be considered to be worthwhile. The final outcome will make a difference in the lives of many people. All teachers have that opportunity to foster awareness among and between microcultures and macrocultures in the local area, state, nation, and world.

The visual construct of the conceptual role of the teacher in multicultural education is not diagrammed in mathematical proportions, but for illustration purposes. This illustration is the result of previously described information. It is as follows:

A VISUAL CONSTRUCT ON THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION



This accelerated class stimulated significant outcomes in multicultural education. We helped each other accept our own human differences so that new and profound insights could be gained in this emerging field of education. We learned to overcome immediate responses in judging human behavior so that new perpectives could broaden our horizons. We provided two lasting contributions through the 36-minute videotape and the visual construct. These contributions provide a basis of ongoing activities to further the cause of multicultural education. A future validation effort will be the development of a conceptual model on the role of the teacher. These continuing efforts have the backing of 15 students who will provide resource assistance to present and future teachers on multicultural education.

The students, who fostered the development of class activities and the validation of the visual construct were the following: Deborah Allen, Philip Bertemes, Monte Brigham, Jeff Brown, Jerry Crane, Karen Dunson, James Gardewin, Michael Germann, Bryan Hawk, Richard Meeks, Carmen Miesse, Brian Newell, Diana Oliver, Tricia Pinkerton, and Karen Violet

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A. Footnotes

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